

One of the E's in EMS stands for "Essential"

- An essential service is a service that the government is required, by law, to provide to its citizens. States have the authority to determine which services are "essential."
- An "essential service" means that the interruption or termination of (an EMS service) would place the public (whether whole or in part) at risk regarding (local EMS coverage.)
- Although EMS is widely viewed as an essential public service, EMS is not a recognized component of the health care safety net. EMS provides a substantial contribution from a safety perspective and a financial perspective.
- EMS is often reported to be at the intersection of health care, public health and public safety.
- Over half the country does not consider EMS an essential service, according to the National Association of State EMS Officials (NAEMSO). This means those working in and providers of emergency medical services have a much harder time accessing funding and other resources needed to keep themselves open.
- Under the current statutes in the *Code of Virginia*, providing pre-hospital care in Virginia is not considered an essential service. While every city/county in VA makes arrangements to provide this critical service for their residents out of necessity, there is no requirement that local governments provide it to their residents.
- In Virginia there are 38 cities and 95 counties. According to the Virginia Dept. of Health, Office of EMS there is at least one ambulance and often times multiple licensed EMS agencies and permitted vehicles in each of these 133 jurisdictions.
- §15.2-955.B of the *Code of Virginia* states "Each locality shall seek to ensure emergency medical services are maintained throughout the entire locality."
- There is a need to recognize, designate and officially codify EMS as an essential service.
- EMS should be considered an essential service of the Commonwealth for its role in ensuring public health, safety and equal access to emergency medical care.
- During the pandemic, EMS was on the front lines, seeing patients with influenza-like illnesses, as well as assisting with vaccinations and dealing with the possibility of alternate treatment (crisis standards of care) and transport protocols. Now more than ever, the important function EMS plays in the public health system needs to be recognized as "essential."
- The public interest is best achieved through the delivery of emergency medical services through a coordinated statewide EMS system.
- The goal of legislation to recognize EMS as an "essential service" are:
 - 1) Ensure a minimum capability across the state. Localities must ensure the availability of a basic level of EMS.
 - 2) Provide flexibility to organize and finance EMS systems to reflect local circumstances.
 - 3) Provide resources (financial, technical, equipment/supplies, etc.) to support voluntary improvement in the EMS system over time. One aspect should include dedicated funding to support locality efforts to meet minimum requirements.
- Recognizing EMS as an essential service will require localities to provide these services or ensure that emergency medical services are maintained throughout the entire locality. Localities can satisfy this

requirement by owning and operating their own ambulance(s), entering an agreement with another local government, hospital or other healthcare facility, or recognizing a public, private, volunteer or non-profit EMS agency as a Designated Emergency Response Agency (DERA) for the locality.

- Localities are not required to appropriate local revenue or otherwise provide ambulance service if the service can be provided by other means.
- Introducing legislation to recognize EMS as an essential service will have no effect on those localities that currently provide or contract for ambulance services.
- Recognizing EMS as an essential service enhances opportunities for access to federal grant funding opportunities (American Rescue Plan Act).
- Because EMS providers are not recognized as essential workers, they have to fight for Tier I priority to receive vaccinations if there is limited vaccine supply for any level of pandemic severity.
- The state and federal government does not support EMS workers or regulate providers to standardize costs. EMS providers struggle for adequate pay and benefits requiring them to work multiple jobs.
- Providers of ambulance services receive below-cost reimbursement for 72% of all transports – this charity care delivered to the uninsured and the under-compensated care results from below-cost Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement.
- Both law enforcement and fire services are funded through governmental sources; EMS relies on a fragmented, conflicted and inadequate patchwork of financing despite its essential public service function.
- The last increase in state funding for EMS was in 2002. The cost of training, vehicles, equipment, and supplies has continued to increase. In addition, supply chain issues often delays the delivery of life saving equipment and vehicles.
- Many EMS services do not offer their EMS providers health benefits and insurance.
- EMS providers have an injury rate three (3) times the national average.
- EMS providers are also ten (10) times more likely to be suicidal compared to other jobs.
- In Virginia, the turnover rate for EMS providers is 25 to 30% every year for volunteers and 10 to 15% for career personnel. EMS staffing shortages are at crisis levels. Recognizing EMS as an essential service is critical to addressing manpower, funding, training and other important issues that threaten the availability of emergency medical services in Virginia.